**Jonah 4: “Some Good News”**

**Josiah Haas**

Good morning! My name is Josiah Haas and I am a pastoral apprentice here at First Free. It’s such an honor to be preaching God’s Word this morning, so thank you Pastor Jason for this unique opportunity.

To my church family, I just want to say that I miss you all so much. You all have truly become like family and I’m so thankful for the different times of connection with you that I’ve had over the phone and Zoom. Thanks for exemplifying what intentional community looks like in the toughest of circumstances.

I also want to say hi to the kids and youth watching. I’m so glad you guys are listening and I want to challenge you to listen closely to what God may be speaking into your life this morning.

Finally, if you’re listening for the first time I’m so glad you’ve tuned in. We are living in an unprecedented time with the Coronavirus where bad news is so prevalent. This morning, I hope you’ll hear the good news that we have in God’s great mercy.

*Let’s pray together*: Father thank you that you have ordained this passage of Jonah 4 to be preached to this congregation, online, at this specific time. In the time of this Coronavirus pandemic, we’re desperate to hear from You. We want more of You God. Open our eyes that we might hear what You are speaking to us today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Introduction: When was the last time you got really angry?

Quarantined so your kids or spouse or parents made you really mad

March Madness ending and you were devastated

College student whose year got gut short, and it’s been really frustrating

Me: Since I’ve had a lot more time I’ve been catching up with some of my college roommates and I was reminded of a time I got really mad. I was on spring break in California with 6 of my best friends, and we were exploring this beautiful valley with vineyards and mountains all around us. There were waterfalls, blue skies, we were going on hikes- it was the dream!! Being a nature guy, I was totally in my element… until all of the sudden we saw this huge building in the middle of the valley. Immediately, I was enraged! And this doesn’t happen to me very often! I really got worked up! I started spewing about how much of an injustice it was to have this building ruin God’s beautiful creation. I was like, “I can’t believe how they’d ruin this beautiful valley! This is horrendous! I’m going over there and I’m gonna take it down brick by brick!!” I was so angry, but I was being completely ridiculous.

Segue: That’s exactly where our main character is at the beginning of this chapter. This is our last Sunday in a series on Jonah, God’s messenger to Nineveh. Last week, we saw Nineveh’s response of repenting to the Lord for their evil. We also saw God’s act of sparring them out of his compassion and mercy. Today, we’re going to look at Jonah 4 and see how Jonah feels about God’s mercy on Nineveh. And we’re going to see that this story may not end like you think it will.

\*Kids and youth, see if you can hear and write down the three questions so that you can talk about them with your parents after the service!

As we look at the text and compare ourselves to Jonah, we’re forced to answer three questions about how we live in relation to God and others. We’ll take these questions one at a time as they come up in the text, and the third question is the big question we need to grapple with.

**Let’s Read Jonah 4:1-4**

1But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. **2**He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. **3**Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” **4**But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Jonah despises God’s mercy on Nineveh. He’s ticked because Nineveh was his enemy!

The construction of the first sentence of verse 1 in Hebrew is the strongest negative judgment you can make.[[1]](#footnote-1)

v. 1 “But to Jonah, this seemed very wrong”

Literally something like “it was evil to Jonah, a great evil.”

God has been merciful, and Jonah sees that as evil!!

He’s ticked and he lets God know in a prayer.

This prayer is reminiscent to Jonah’s prayer in the fish from Jonah 2

Except in Jonah 2 he praises God’s deliverance of Him

But in Jonah 4 he despises God’s deliverance of Nineveh

He says, “God, I told you so! This is why I ran away in the first place!!”

And then he goes on to rattle off a completely scriptural depiction of who God is

He says God is “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity”

These exact words are used to describe God in the passages like Exodus 34 and Psalm 86

Ironically, these words are extremely comforting to us in this season!

It is good for us to remember these things:

God is full of compassion

He is abounding in love

He relents from sending calamity

Jonah’s words are true words, but they show how far he is from the heart of God

In fact, these words are functioning as a contrast and foil to Jonah, for…

He has not had grace and compassion

He has been quick to anger and lacking in love

He desired for Nineveh to be destroyed

He wishes he could prevent God from being so merciful!!

He sounds correct, but he’s not living it out!!!

This is exactly what Jesus admonishes the Pharisees and the religious leaders about over and over in the gospels

Matthew 23:27-28 Jesus says: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Jonah is a whitewashed tomb. He knows the right things but on the inside he’s ugly

We look at Jonah and think- how could he respond to God this way?

How could he be so self-centered?

But this is us…

Scary truth: we can know a lot about God and be far from him

We can know God’s attributes and be exhibiting the exact opposite

This is why we need to ask this question: Does your Heart Posture Align with the Heart of God?

Unlike Jonah, we should ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and know us

To show us where there’s a disconnect between our lives and God’s way

As we’re convicted, we can confess our sins and ask Him to change us

To shape us more into His image

Does your Heart Posture Align with the Heart of God?

Jonah’s clearly doesn’t.

He’s so mad, in verse 3 he demands that God take his life.

He’d rather see death than God’s mercy.

What comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and his words show how ugly his heart is

His desires are completely disordered

His heart posture is completely convoluted

And God asks him, “is it right for you to be angry?”

We don’t get an immediate answer from Jonah, but he will give us an answer later.

Now, we just move to the next scene of the story

**Let’s continue reading Jonah 4:5-6**

**5**Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. **6**Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.

Jonah goes to the east of the city

            In the OT, moving east is often a depiction of moving away from God’s presence

                        An example of this is Cain in Genesis 4

Jonah goes east and he makes a little shelter… and he waits

            He gets his chair and his imaginary popcorn and he just stakes out

What is he expecting to see?

            Maybe he thinks God’s relent was only temporary and that judgment will come

            In fact, this is likely his wishful thinking

His whole posture in this chapter shows his disposition to wanting Nineveh to be destroyed

In the meantime, God provides a plant for Jonah!

            Apparently his shelter did not come with air conditioning and was not adequate

                        This is a reminder that God has been sovereign over His creation this whole time

                                    Remember: he sent a storm, he sent a fish

                                                God has been sovereign over everything happening

In addition, this is a reminder that God is still merciful to us when we are far from him

                                    Praise God!

Jonah is ecstatic

He loves God’s mercy on Him

But he hated God’s mercy on Nineveh

The same construction from verse 1 shows the greatest possible judgment occurs again

v. 1 when God had mercy on Nineveh: “this seemed very wrong, and he became angry”

literally: “it was evil, a great evil”

v. 6 when God had mercy on him: “Jonah was very happy about the plant.”

Literally: “it was a joy, a great joy”

This contrast shows us how selfish Jonah is

He’s arrogant, egotistic, and self-obsessed

He despises God’s salvation of others but loves God’s salvation of him

This brings us to our second question: Do you Love Others as you Love Yourself?

Do you love your Neighbors

DYLY Enemies

DYL People different fr/you

DYL People in your own house

One of the fundamental teachings of the OT is to love your neighbor as yourself

Jonah should know this from Lev. 19:18

Jonah hates Nineveh because they’re his enemy

But he should know the consistent OT standard of loving your enemy[[2]](#footnote-2)

Jonah should love Nineveh, but he hates them.

Do you Love Others as you Love Yourself?

Church, we live in an unprecedented time. A time where because of the Coronavirus there is so much fear, sorrow, pain, and uncertainty.

We as the church have a humongous opportunity to share God’s love!

Historically, the church has shown up in times of major plague or crisis

There are so many ways we can love others during this time:

The first is to follow the appropriate medical guidelines of social distancing so that this virus does not spread more and more to the most vulnerable in society. We want to honor our authorities in this way

But that’s not all we can do! There’s so much more!

\*Offer to pick up groceries for a person more vulnerable to the virus

\*Pick up the phone and call someone and encourage them

\*Donate money to organizations like Breakthrough Urban Ministries that are continuing to serve people in need

\*Get on our knees and pray for God to bring healing to the sick and for people to somehow hear the good news of the gospel in a time of so much bad news

In no way is this earning your salvation

It’s an overflow of Christ’s love that he has poured out on you!

It’s a response to Jesus’ love for us!

Jonah clearly loves himself and hates Nineveh

He’s self-centered and completely hypocritical!

We have an opportunity to be different and to share the love of Christ with each other

<At this point, aren’t you wondering how this story ends? Will Jonah finally get it? Let’s move toward the final question of this passage and read the remainder of the story>

**Here’s Verses 7-11**

**7**But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. **8**When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

**9**But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

**10**But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11**And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

God provides again- every time we see this word it’s a reminder of His sovereign action

            Provides a worm that chews the plant and it dies

            Provides a wind… and these things are representations of God’s judgment

                        Now Jonah is hot and grows faint

God in His sovereignty is teaching Jonah a lesson

            God uses this physical phenomenon to teach Jonah a spiritual truth

                        He often does this in the OT

God teaches him a lesson because He loves him!

             God disciplines his children as a father the child he delights in (Prov. 3:11-12)

Max Lucado says this: “God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way.”

God loves Jonah enough to correct where he’s gone astray

This is the point where we really want Jonah to get it

To realize how off-center he is, to repent and accept the lesson God is teaching him

We want him to say:

“I get it God! I loved your mercy on me and hated your mercy on Nineveh. I desired judgment on Nineveh but hate judgment on myself. I repent. I’m so sorry”

This is his moment after all that’s happened that he can turn and repent

But instead, Jonah despises God’s judgment on Him

So, we get a déjà vu of earlier in the chapter

Jonah says, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

God responds: “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

Previously Jonah didn’t respond, but now he does: “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

Jonah’s response confirms that he is so self-centered that he’s totally missed the lesson God is trying to teach him

            And he’s so mad about God’s judgment on him that he’d rather die. He’d rather die!

Don’t worry, God gets the last word in this story

Let’s look back at the final words of God in this story

**10**But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11**And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

God is saying: you didn’t create the plant. It literally just appeared, and because I told it to, and you’re concerned for it.

But I’m the Creator and Sustainer of the universe! Do I not have the right to show mercy to the city of people that I have created?

God says: there’s 120,000 people there and they are hopeless!

God even mentions that there’s many animals in the city!!!

“That’s my creation!!”

God desires to be reconciled with His creation! That’s what he’s saying!

God loves to pour out his mercy throughout the world- it’s what He does!

Here he asks this question, “Do I not have the right to show mercy to my city?”

And the book just ends.

What does Jonah do? How does he respond? Does he die? Repent? We’re never told

The book ends this way for a reason

We’ve just seen Jonah consistently respond to God in the wrong way

This ending pushes us to respond in the right way

The rhetorical effect is that we should be screaming YES

Yes of course God! You created Nineveh! You sustain life itself! You have the right to display your mercy in radical ways! Because you are God! You are gracious and compassionate! Slow to anger and abounding in love! Relenting of calamity! **You have the right to pour out mercy!**

God has the right to pour out his mercy

It could not be more divinely orchestrated to have this message on this day.

For today is Palm Sunday

On Palm Sunday we remember the coming of Jesus to Jerusalem.

And Jesus is the Messiah and God’s agent of mercy to the world!

We, like Nineveh, have sinned and fallen short of God’s standards.

We have done evil in His sight.

We deserve judgment and death.

But Jesus came to earth, and he sacrificed his life so that if we believe in him we might not receive the punishment we deserve.

He took that guilt upon himself as he died on the cross.

And through His resurrection, he enacts God’s grace and mercy to all of humanity.

This week on social media I saw John Krasinski, a famous actor from many movies and “The Office” started a campaign called SGN- Some Good News. In a time where people are hopeless and there’s so much bad news, he felt like people could use some stories of good news. So, he asked on social media and people shared their positive stories, which he highlighted in a video. All these stories are truly good news.

I know there’s a lot of bad news in the world right now, but hear this message anew today: there is no better news in the world than God’s mercy through the person of Jesus Christ. This is not just some good news- It’s the best news you’re ever gonna hear. It’s Mind-blowing. History-shaking. Life-changing.

Whether you’re hearing this the first time or the thousandth time, here’s the final question you must answer today: **How do you respond to God’s mercy?**

Do you despise God for His mercy like Jonah did?

Or do you fall on your knees in repentance?

Do you realize the weight of what God has done for you?

Do you believe in Him?

Do you cry out and worship Him for sending Jesus to cover your sins?

And do you go out into the world to tell others about God’s great mercy?

How do you respond to God’s mercy?

As we’re in our homes, here’s a couple appropriate responses:

\*If you’re hearing of God’s great mercy for the first time, you can right here pray and put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

\*God, I’ve sinned and deserve judgment. I fall short of your standard. Jesus I confess my sins and I put my faith in you. I commit to following you from this point forward.

\*If you’d like to learn more about what a life following God is like, please Facebook message us and we’d love to talk with you about it!

\*If you’ve put your faith in Christ…

\*Pray for God to show his mercy on this great city of Chicago in our time of need

\*Just as he did on the great city of Nineveh

\*Pray and repent of the things God has been convicting you of this morning

\*Commit to being an agent of God’s love and mercy to those around you

\*Worship God for His great mercy the good news we have in Jesus Christ

How do you respond? As we transition back into worship, I encourage you to pour out your hearts individually as we respond to Him from all around Chicago.

Let me pray for us: God we’re in awe of your great mercy. Thank you for how you poured out your mercy on the city of Nineveh, and thank you for pouring your mercy out on us through the person of Jesus Christ. We now respond to you with our praise and worship. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Benediction from Romans 12:1

**12**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

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2. Prov. 25:21; Ex. 23:4-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)